(d) Besides, pre-exploratory works by the Directorate General of Hydrocarbon during this period, Oil & Natural Gas Corporation Ltd. (ONGC), Oil India Ltd. (OIL) and Private/Joint Venture Companies will put in exploratory efforts such as the surveys and drilling of wells in the areas where they hold Petroleum Exploration Licenses (PEL). Production operations in virgin area can start only after a hydrocarbon discovery is made followed by appraisal and establishment of techno-economic viability, for which no time frame can be laid down.

(e) As per the New Exploration Licensing Policy (NELP), exploration blocks are offered through the process of international competitive bidding, where National Oil Companies and private parties, including foreign companies, can participate.

Shortage of LPG in Kerala

724. SHRI N. K. PREMACHANDRAN: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that many places in Kerala are experiencing acute shortage of LPG for the last few months;

(b) if so, the reasons for the indefinite delay in supplying LPG cylinders to customers and the arrangements made to overcome the shortage;

(c) whether Government propose to consider to reduce the booking backlog experienced in the worst hit rural areas of Kerala; and

(d) the number of newly allotted LPG connections in Kerala during this year?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI SANTOSH GANGWAR): (a) to (c) The supply of LPG has been adversely affected in Kerala during the months of December, 2002 to January, 2003 due to the unplanned shut down of refinery of M/s Reliance Industries Limited, M/s Kochi Refinery Limited and the strike of LPG bulk transporters. Public Sector Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) have since made arrangements to make up the shortfall by operating bottling plants in the extended hours and Sunday/ holidays. Additional packed LPG supplies are also being arranged from the neighbouring States to meet the shortage. It is expected that the supply of LPG in Kerala would be normal by the 1st week of March, 2003.

(d) OMCs have released about 3.4 lakh LPG connections in the State of Kerala during the period from April, 2002 to January, 2003.

Companies engaged in oil exploration

725. SHRI RAVULA CHANDRA SEKAR REDDY: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) the number and names of Indian and foreign companies that have been assigned the work of oil exploration on Indian Oil and off-shore places; and

(b) the name of the companies that have been successful in finding gas?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI SANTOSH GANGWAR): (a) A Statement indicating the names of Indian and foreign companies which are at present involved in Exploration & Production activities in onland and offshore areas is enclosed. (*See* below)

(b) Gas discoveries have recently been made by the following Operating companies:—

1. Cairn Energy Plc. U.K.
2. Niko Resources Ltd.
3. Oil & Natural Gas Corporation Ltd. (ONGC)
4. Oil India Ltd. (OIL)
5. Reliance Industries Ltd.

Statement

Companies engaged in oil exploration

Indian Companies

1. Assam Company Ltd.
2. Essar Oil Ltd.
3. GAIL India Ltd.
4. General Fibres Dealers Ltd.
5. Gujarat State Petroleum Corporation Ltd.